



Burn Prevention Among Persons With Diabetic Neuropathy

What is Diabetic Neuropathy?

Diabetic neuropathy is a nerve disorder caused by diabetes. Symptoms of neuropathy include numbness and sometimes pain in the hands, feet, or legs. Peripheral neuropathy, the most common type of neuropathy, damages the nerves of the limbs, especially the feet.

Common symptoms of this kind of neuropathy are:

- Numbness or insensitivity to pain or temperature;
- Tingling, burning, or prickling;
- Sharp pains or cramps;
- Extreme sensitivity to touch, even light touch;
- Loss of balance and coordination.

Sixty percent of patients with diabetes have some form of neuropathy, but in many cases there are no symptoms. Because diabetic neuropathy may cause insensitivity to pain or temperature, it increases the risk of burn injuries. Most burn injuries which have diabetic neuropathy as a contributing factor were due to warming/soaking the feet, either by placing the feet near a heating device, heating blanket/pad, or putting the feet into water that was too hot.

While the burned area of the body may be small, complications can arise and lead to subsequent amputation. Because of the loss of sensation caused by neuropathy, burns or injuries to the feet may go unnoticed and may become ulcerated; thus, prevention and early detection is vital to the treatment of peripheral neuropathy and subsequent complications.

Prevention

Persons with diabetic neuropathy can utilize the following suggestions to help prevent thermal injuries to the legs and feet, where such injuries are most common.

- Carefully examine your feet and toes daily for any burns, sores, bruises, bumps, or infections.
- Test the water temperature with your elbow/forearm before stepping in a bath.
- Wash your feet daily, using warm (not hot) water and a mild soap. Dry your feet carefully with a soft towel, especially between the toes.
- Avoid walking barefoot, especially on hot sand, or hot pavement.
- To avoid friction burns, wear shoes that fit your feet well and allow your toes to move. Break in new shoes gradually, wearing them for only an hour at a time at first. Wear thick, soft socks and avoid slippery stockings, mended stockings, or stockings with seams.
- Avoid using heating pads or hot water bottles. Wear socks if your feet are cold or ask your physician about other methods to improve circulation.
- Ask your physician to check your feet at every visit, and call your physician if you notice that a burn or sore is not healing well.